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SUBJECT: Goma Situation Report for December 19, 2007

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED - PROTECT ACCORDINGLY

Note: The following report was provided by Embassy Kinshasa's political officer in Goma. End note.

1. (SBU) Summary: The military situation in North Kivu remained calm for a second day December 19; reports of fighting in Masisi and Sake appear to be incorrect. MONUC General Singh and Narayan advised FARDC General Kayembe that FARDC could not mount a second offensive for six months. FARDC morale is low, MONUC believes, and its leadership is taking extensive steps to reinforce its positions in the province. Pro-Nkunda forces are making no moves against FARDC. FARDC General Amisi is emerging as the scapegoat for the failure of the Masisi offensive. Pareco and Nkunda forces denied looting a MONUC helicopter which crash-landed in Masisi territory. Senior MONUC officials persuaded the Rutshuru territorial administrator to release four WFP drivers he had illegally detained for two days. There was an unconfirmed report of a case of ebola fever near the Ugandan border. Goma riot police fired shots in the air this morning to disperse a crowd of demonstrators protesting the killing of a prisoner in police custody the day before. End summary.

2. (SBU) The military situation in North Kivu was stable as of the morning of December 19, with no overnight reports of renewed fighting. Katale and Rugari, scenes of combat earlier in the week, are silent, according to MONUC North Kivu Brigade Commander General Indrajeet Narayan. "Nkunda is doing nothing," he said. Nyanzale remains under FARDC control and Mushaki is with Nkunda forces. MONUC-Goma political chief Gernot Sauer said reports of fighting in Masisi town and Sake were false. Firing heard in Masisi was in fact due to drunken soldiers. The major event of the previous day in Sake was the visit of American actor Ben Affleck, who, reported MONUC spokesperson Sylvie van den Wildenberg, trekked up Celtel ridge as far as a landmark building known locally as the White House.

MONUC on FARDC

3. (SBU) Narayan said he and Eastern Division Commander General Bikram Singh had counseled caution in their December 18 meeting with FARDC Chief of Staff General Dieudonne Kayembe and senior commanders. He said they had advised FARDC to use the next six months to take stock of the situation, replace commanders, train troops, and take military action only if political dialogue fails. Returning to a consistent theme, Narayan said, "If they don't realize the importance of the political process, it will be folly." As to the state of FARDC morale, he stated: "Panic has really set in everywhere."

4. (SBU) Current FARDC moves center on reinforcement. "They are keeping their options open," said Narayan. Kayembe and his generals

remain in Goma, and held a lunchtime meeting with Mayala at the dining room of Hotel Linda. FARDC has requested MONUC assistance to reinforce Katale and to ferry the re-formed 81st Brigade back to Masisi. Helicopter availability and fuel will affect MONUC's ability to fulfill these requests as it is currently experiencing a fuel crisis due to shortages in Kenya, its main source of supply.

¶5. (SBU) FARDC has also ordered the 1st and 13th Integrated Brigades (IB) south from Ituri District. When the move is complete, Narayan said, "Ituri will have virtually no troops." Half of the 15th IB remains in the Nyanzale area, with the rest having fled north, while looting, toward Kibirizi and Riwindi. The brigade "has completely disintegrated," said Sauer, and Kayembe has ordered the 7th IB to replace it after turning down a proposal by 9th IB commander Colonel Smith Kihanga. Kihanga, like other former commanders of the Rwandan-backed Congolese National Army (ANC) which joined the FARDC, has been the object of rumors questioning his loyalty because of previous association with Nkunda.

¶6. (SBU) FARDC Land Forces Commander General Gabriel Amisi appears to be emerging as the scapegoat for the failure of the Masisi offensive. Amisi, another former ANC colleague of Nkunda, is the subject of a rumor alleging he arrived in Mushaki during the Nkunda counter-offensive to bribe troops of the 14th IB to retreat. More likely, said Narayan, he was there trying to rally them. Narayan said 14th IB troops had been more interested in stealing cattle while in Mushaki.

¶7. (SBU) Narayan identified two reasons for Nkunda's continued battlefield successes, despite enormous deficits in men and materiel. First, Nkunda has convinced his men that they are fighting for a cause, and is able to play off FARDC abuses and atrocities to continually make his point. Second, in contrast to FARDC, his forces have good officers and leadership. Without MONUC,

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Narayan said, Nkunda's forces could have routed FARDC and moved into Goma. He estimated that 15 per cent of pro-Nkunda fighters are underage.

Developments in Masisi

¶8. (SBU) In Masisi territory, a MONUC helicopter which crash-landed at Matanda, 10 kms. west of Mushaki, was "completely looted" after Nkunda and Pareco fighters appeared on the scene soon after the crash, Sauer said. There were no casualties from the crash, but one crew member died of a heart attack soon after all 11 passengers and crew fled an exchange of fire between the belligerents. Sauer said the helicopter was on a regularly-scheduled flight to Walikale when it developed mechanical problems. MONUC troops remain at the site after rescuing the accident victims, who are being treated at the North Kivu Brigade hospital in Goma. When contacted by MONUC, representatives of Nkunda and Pareco blamed each other for the looting.

¶9. (SBU) Sauer said the MONUC troops diverted to the crash site had been investigating reports of the killing of 27 Hutu villagers in Musangati, a remote site five hours by foot from Mushaki. They found that Nkunda troops had killed one person, a teacher, and abducted 17 others -- men, women and children -- for reasons that remain unknown.

Developments in Rutshuru

¶10. (SBU) In Rutshuru territory, Singh, Narayan, MONUC Head of Office Ulli Mwambulukutu and civil affairs chief Joseph Ingangi persuaded Territorial Administrator Dominique Bofondo at a December 17 meeting in Rutshuru town to release four WFP drivers he had ordered arrested and detained over two days. WFP and the NGO Solidarite suspended their activities in protest. WFP provincial chief Aya Scheerson called this only the latest in a long series of outrages by Bofondo, accusing him of regularly inciting IDP's against MONUC and NGO's. A visiting UNICEF official from Kinshasa

said December 17 he had protested to Governor Julien Paluku about Bofondo's contact; Narayan said UNHCR chief Antonio Guterres had promised to raise the issue with Paluku as well. Ingangi said he planned a follow-up visit with Schneerson to see Bofondo later in the week pending availability of MONUC escort.

¶11. (SBU) Elsewhere in Rutshuru, Sauer noted a report of a case of ebola hemorrhagic fever in Ishusa, northeast of Rutshuru town near an area of Uganda which has had cases in the past. He emphasized that the report remained unconfirmed. He also provided additional information on the PNC officer killed by FARDC during the December 16 Rugari firefight. He said FARDC alleged the officer and a colleague had fired small arms from behind positions of the 2nd IB, which shot the first dead and arrested the second. Sauer said MONUC was attempting to get the second officer released. He reported five fighters -- four Mai-Mai, one Nkunda -- had surrendered at MONUC's base outside Rutshuru.

Developments in the Grand Nord

¶12. (BU) According to MONUC DDRRR's section, members of the FDLR Musari faction attempted to prevent the surrender of 40 FDLR fighters who had turned themselves in at Lubero. Sauer said MONUC was able to extract the 40, and will repatriate them to Rwanda. He also noted an unconfirmed report that one of Nkunda's senior commanders, General Bwambale Kakolele, a Nande originally from Ituri, had been seen in Lubero meeting with the city's mayor.

Situation in Goma

¶13. (SBU) Sauer clarified that shots heard in Goma on the morning of December 19 were fired into the air by riot police attempting to disperse a crowd protesting the death of a prisoner at the Birere police station the day before. The protest tied up traffic for most of the early morning. Sauer had no information on possible casualties, but said MONUC had met this morning with the PNC provincial inspector general, who claimed he had not ordered the use of firearms.

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